

Comic Fandom

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Herb Trimpe Interview!



*From Batman to Gotham:
50 Years of Comic Book TV Heroes
Part One of A Three Part Series*

Jef Parker and the Beginning of Collector's Edge Comics Part 1

In recent times I've been reminiscing and thinking about the "old days" of growing up in Milwaukee in general, and comic collecting in particular. I have a lot of good memories of the time I spent at my first "real" comic shop, one that had new and old comics neatly organized into bags and boxes and was a dedicated shop. Eventually this shop would grow into the Collector's Edge Comics chain that is now a historic fixture for comic collectors in Milwaukee.

So as I was searching for any background that could be found on the internet, I saw that the Collector's Edge website has a "timeline" area that has some history of how it came to be. One entry in "The Parker Age" section caught my attention:

"Jef liquidates his comic collection (including full runs of early Marvels) to produce capital to open the shop. Jef inherits employee Gabe Serafin from Excalibur Comics, as well as a teenager named Robbie."

Yes dear reader, I am *that* "teenager named Robbie." How I came to be immortalized in the history of Milwaukee's (even Wisconsin's) largest and longest running comic store chain is a fascinating story of serendipity in a unique period in the history of comic collecting.

The store had an interesting beginning, and I was there at the start of it. The story is full of triumph, tragedy, struggles, colorful characters, encounters with comic artists, and some fascinating local history. I will also be able to fill in some missing pieces of the transition from the original store that Jef Parker acquired and built into Collector's Edge way back in the late 80s.

This is going to be a fairly long document, as I am also using it to get down some of my own personal memories. As such, it might contain more weird specific details and minutiae of things that made an impression on me specifically that might not otherwise register with anyone else. I will attempt to give a sense of the time, a flavor of life in Milwaukee at the end of the 70s and the dawn of the 80s decade, and a sense of what the comic market was like at that time. I will try to write it as creatively as I can to make these details as interesting as possible. This is more important to document to me than for anyone else, but hopefully someday the story will find its way to others who knew the participants and that time and place and it will have some meaning to them as well.

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Herb Trimpe: My name's Herb Trimpe. I live in a really neat place in upstate New York and right now I'm looking at Robin, also a terrific landscape out this huge glass window. I may be making that up so nobody will ever know. (laughter) We moved in about a year ago and have been gradually, room by room, trying to get things in shape. The House has been empty for over a year, so it was kind of a wreck when we came in. So much so that the real estate agent didn't was too embarrassed to show the house, because it's like a perfect made 50s *Father Knows Best* kind of...built like a brick shit house you know.

Robin Dale: Well at least it has this nice little side room there that you use as your studio.

HT: Yeah that was a sun room, there's no heating in it right now, except we do have a wood burning stove, it's under the house. We had it insulated. If there was no insulation in there on a day like today it would be just as cold in there as it is outside, but the insulation helps out a lot. Put some lights in and painted, so that that was actually one of the first spaces to get, you know, get a little attention. Besides the bathrooms which are - the two most important are the bathrooms and the kitchen. That's the absolute. You gotta have them.

RD: Why don't you go ahead and tell us a little about how you got started in art?

HT: In grade school there's always a couple of kids who can draw in class, or want to draw. Not that they can, but they want to and that's what they spend their time doing, doodling and so on. Now they find out that doodling is a good thing in class because it helps certain types of people to learn. They learn easier when they're fiddling with something on a piece of paper with a pencil. My interest was primarily, even as a kid, I was fascinated by comic strips of the daily reader in the *Daily News* and Sunday sections. Pretty much just read about everything, used to cut out comic strips over a period of weeks and paste them

together and then run like a movie with a little cardboard stage and a curtain and all that kind of thing for a limited audience, which is probably your friends. You know if you could trap them into sitting there for 10 or 15 minutes while you did that.

So I love strip art you know, and the comics I read as a kid were mostly Disney stuff, or Looney Tunes, or Warner Brothers, that kind of thing. That was of a pretty intense interest to me and the first drawings I made we're probably copies or tracings of Disney characters. Scrooge McDuck in the money bin and the whole nine yards, that was very exciting to me. They had very incredibly amazing adventure stories in some of those Disney comics in those days. I think they still try to replicate that. I've seen some latter day things that are similar, but there was a magic to it and it was the heyday of all the animated films and all.



Incredible Hulk Vol. 1, #109

So yeah that was a lot of fun. When I was in junior high school (which is now called middle school) I would eat lunch at my cousin's house, which was a block and a half away or so, and he's the one that - I never myself had a comic book collection, but I had a couple of cousins that had extensive comic book collections. My cousin Kenny was one of those and he lived nearby and he was a couple of grades ahead of me, and my Aunt would make us lunch and we'd sit around reading his comics. I think I was most impressed with, that I was most interested in those days was Superman, which I still - if there's any character I would still like to do a story, it would be probably Superman. Superman, Captain Marvel, which was the old Captain Marvel, which was really kind of a funky strip. Plastic Man was one of my all time favorites also, it was great, and some of the other Fawcett titles. I think I was drawn more towards Fawcett, I didn't really read Batman, Wonder Woman was, I don't know, I can't remember the guy that drew that in the 50s...

RD: H. G. Peters?

HT: Yeah, yeah. He had a very interesting style, very stylized. That's another thing that probably drew me to comics is the wide variety of styles among the different artists, which I don't think you get today so much. You know as the business has become corporate so has the art, unfortunately. (laughter) I mean I don't know, I am so far outside the loop in terms of what's going on in the business, the only connection I have now is through the shows, and from my wife, Patricia, and her encouragement, we started to do shows a couple of years ago. Got to see some people I hadn't seen in years, and go to see some people I never met that I always wanted to. Primarily talk about comics which is something I hadn't done since 1996 when Marvel went bankrupt and I had to find another job.

Anyway in I think high school, after the Disney stuff and the Fawcett stuff and you know some of that early Action and Adventure stuff in the 50s, by the time I hit high school I was a huge E.C. fan, and again it was a friend of mine, my baseball buddy in high school. I think he subscribed to E.C. Comics in those days, and he got *Mad* when it was the big 25 cent edition magazine format. I remember specifically the larger format. It was very exciting stuff, I mean crazy and whacky and funny, and he pretty much

bought most of the E.C. line, you know which to me was, and still to this day, is just the best comics ever.

I mean super hero stuff is pretty stupid when you really get down to it. The only way I can justify it is it somehow, in a culture that's very, how should we say, dollar-oriented, profit-margin oriented, not a lot of mythology in our culture. I think comics maybe take the place of that, they supplied us with a kind of, you know, cultural icons that we can look towards for some sort of entertainment and guidelines, especially for kids you know. So I was a big E.C. fan and Jack Davis being my particular one, with Wally Wood, John Severin coming in pretty close behind. I love Wood's stuff. I met Wally once. The first or second time I met him, it was a friend of ours, Flo Steinberg, who was our gal Friday for Stan when I first started the work

there in the middle 60s, and I had met Wally at a party or something like that, and Flo not too long after published an underground comic called Big Apple comics or something like that, and I did a couple of stories. One of them I did, which Wally inked, and after that had happened, and he had inked the story, he said to me at a party - he played the guitar by the way, he didn't know many chords, but he knew a whole bunch of folk songs and you don't need to know many chords, just the three chord run and progression - and he said to me, "You know, I never really thought much of your work until I inked that story you did for Flo." So I didn't know exactly how to take that (laughter) but I was happy you know, whatever.



Rolling Stone Magazine #91

I mean you know just making that transition into the Marvel Universe from an E.C. you know, worshipping the E.C. style, and not only the artists but the way they told stories, to the kinds of stories they told, the fact that they were short, I thought that's the way a comic should be - six, eight, ten pages maybe at the most. It's like movies today, if you can't say it in two hours don't say it, you know what I mean? It's very hard for me to go see a movie that's up in the three hours. It's usually a lot of un-edited material that, you know, driven by directors big egos and stuff (laughter) I don't know, you got to tell it so that it makes sense in a relatively decent period of time. In the old days was an hour and a half movie, hour and ten or fifteen minutes.

RD: Some of the ones in the 20s and 30s were 60, 70 minutes

HT: That's perfect. It's a great length for a movie. Nothing drags. No big close ups, get to the point (laughter). Yeah sometimes realism is no good. It's kind of like a lot of reality TV, it's like sitting in somebody's living room and just listening to the conversation. When I first started at Marvel, you know, I didn't really have any samples. I think the same day I went to Marvel, or called them for an interview, it was the same day I went to DC. I think I was at DC in the morning and Marvel in the afternoon. I lived in Peakskill at the time so I was commuting. I had just gotten out of the Air Force, a year in Vietnam, back to the US, and John Verpoorten who was the production manager up there was one of my art school buddies, and he said well you know bring some stuff up and I said I don't have any work John! The only thing I had was art school samples and he said well bring those you know. So I went up there and I talked to Sol Brodsky and I got inking freelance on the western stuff, inking Werner Roth and some others I can't really remember. I don't think I inked Larry Lieber until later on. I pretty much right away got the inking there, and you know there was not a lot of self-importance going on about comics. Matter fact in those days they were trying to keep, to me it's like yesterday almost, but I mean in that span of time between then and now, comics did not have a lot of clout in terms of the culture you know. In fact normally you would not admit you read comics and you would hide them, if you were a kid, in your school books and things like that. It was not considered high art.

I inked some stories for a while, maybe for a couple months or so, got a call from Sol one day and he said they were going to buy a copy machine, because in the days of cut and paste, when cut and paste was really cut and paste, scissors and rubber cement, all your copy and layouts would be sent out to a printer and they'd send you back, you know, camera ready galleys of whatever was going to be on that page, and you'd cut it up and arrange it so it fit within the blue lines and all that kind of thing. So rather than send that stuff out anymore to have it done we got this in-house camera. Now this is not in any stretch of the imagination like a present day copier. The one I have, the big ones, they give you a print quality work. You can make black and white copies in ten generations down the road it still looks just as good. So this machine was probably as long

as this room is wide, and it was a huge camera you could raise and lower on a board and you'd feed photographic paper into it. You'd actually, as I remember, get a negative. But anyway most of the machine was bath just like in a dark room. I mean I went through to two solutions, a developer and a fixer, and then it went on a dryer you know. Well you actually got it over a sink and you just washed all the chemicals off it, you held it and washed it off in the sink, and then you put it on the dryer. And the whole process for - like when Morrie was screaming for a masthead or something else like that to stick on a cover that was overdue, it would take probably about 20 minutes to go through the whole process I would say.

So Sol called me up one day and said we're buying one of these machines, I remember I-Tech, and an older guy Mr. Anderson came over to the office and after Sol offered me the job and I said yeah sure, it was a staff job, and he said you can get freelance on the side that kind of thing. I said yeah I'd be happy to do that. So I ran the stat machine for about six months or so, and I did inking on the side. I think it was during that period that Gary Friedrich and I did the Phantom Eagle and I was inking westerns and stuff like that, and also doing a little bit of production work too, and I think that went on for about six months, I think because I had art ability. I started doing production full time and, I worked in the bullpen, so they hired Stu Schwartzberg for the copy machine. If I didn't have anything to do in the office I could work on my freelance or I could do cut and paste-ups, some mechanical stuff like that. So that went along, I think I was there a total of eight months in the office or maybe up to a year. Although first I started I think on the copy machine, and I think it was \$135 a week with benefits, which was really good money.

RD: So this is like the late 60s?

HT: Yeah middle to late 60s, and it wasn't long before I was making \$185 you know and then it went up to \$250 and things were looking good. I stayed on as a salaried staffer until the end actually. I never had a written contract. That was one of the points, well it wasn't a dispute or a contradiction actually, but I was considered a contract artist and there were certain provisions in the termination papers, they used that word, and I said I'm not a contract artist, you know,



Super Villain Team-Up #5

I'm a salaried employee, so I'm either fired or I'm not. It's not like breaking a contract you know. So they basically ignored the question, but with the reserve that I could - when I left is when I finally left, when they were really hurting, and a lot of other people were going too. I think it was a total of about 200 people over - there were three periods where they were firing and I think I made it to the last cut. I was doing *Fantastic Four Unlimited* which was a marginal book, it was breaking even at 30-35,000 copies a quarter, which was minuscule numbers compared to what the books were selling when I started. *Spider-Man* was up to 600 hundred thousand, *The Hulk* 350-400 thousand, I mean it was a lot of comics being sold. But the fan base wasn't as fanatical as it is now, it wasn't as hard core you know, but there was just more casual buying in those days. The collector's market wasn't anywhere where it is now. There might have been a few people out there that collected stuff in the 30s and 40s and so on. But as far as you know selling your artwork or originals, it was very week by today's standards. Thank God otherwise we wouldn't be sitting here!

It was between that six month period, operating a copy machine and doing production and paste-ups and all that, that Stan stuck his head in the office one day and said "Trimpe how do you feel about drawing *The Hulk*, you want to take over *The Hulk*?" Which was then in *Tales to Astonish*. It was half the book with Sub Mariner and Marie [Severin] had been doing it. He had other plans for her, she was doing a lot of coloring and some other penciling and so on and she was working on *Dr. Strange* at some point, and the question was did I want to take on *The Hulk*. But really it wasn't a big deal to me, to me it meant "OK that's good because that's steady monthly money" and for ever how long that lasts, it really doesn't matter. I didn't worry too much whether I could handle it or not. I mean I already was quite aware that I was not the artist that most of the people that worked there was, you know, I mean they were icons - John Romita, John Buscema, Bill Everett, Jack Kirby who is still in my opinion *the king*, *the king*, Jack is *the king* folks! If you want to know how to do it, ask Jack! (laughter) I mean that's Mr. Comic Book. He and Stan revolutionized the business there is no question about it, it opened up the whole door. I mean it's not like there weren't super heroes before, I mean Superman is the prototype modern day superhero.

So anyway I said Yeah sure blah blah blah, I don't know what happened next! I think one of the reasons Stan saw me working at the same level these other guys - because the first thing he did was, I was laying out pages like E.C. Comics and pacing my action like that, and my drawings would look like Jack Davis, and he said no, we don't do that here. He didn't say that exactly. (laughter) I mean you know he said I'm going to have Frank Giacoia lay out a story and I had already inked some of *Tales to Astonish* stories that Marie had done to kind of gradually get into it, and I don't know how many issues I inked of hers, maybe three or four or so. But anyway so you know, I remember the first three or four pages I took in, it was a story that had been assigned. They ended up in the wastebasket - Stan didn't throw them in the waste basket, I threw it in the waste basket. He said let me

get Frank to lay out a story and then you can go over it, tighten it up, and see what we got. So Frank laid out one of the issues, you know I have pretty clear image of his layouts and they were really beautiful. I tightened them up and I don't know who inked it. But at any rate Stan was satisfied of course you know so the real test, really, was the next book I laid out and there was no problem with it, it was fine, I mean I kind of got in one issue. It didn't suit my thinking, because I think primarily I was always a cartoonist and Jack Davis had a very strong cartoony kind of adventure style, where Wally Wood was more illustrative as was everybody else, but Jack had kind of a cartoony look to his stuff and I just idolized it. I just thought it was the best stuff going. I tried to create all that cross-hatching in those you know solid angular bodies and all.



Defenders Vol. 1, #68

So when I got into this superhero genre it was kind of tough because I had to draw, you know, and I couldn't draw that well, I really wasn't that good on the figure. I mean Kirby, he had done more successfully something that nobody else has probably ever done in comics, and that's create a language. I think every artist creates a language. It's a language that the reader understands, and it's the way you yourself handle the artwork, the line, the tone, the color, the shading and all that kind of thing, and what you need to do is find the best way to do that for you in the quickest amount of time, because this is not stuff hanging on the walls in The Met you know? It needs to be done and it needs to be done in a certain time

because it's a business. I'm trying to make schedules here. Also you have to consider the other people that are in the chain of event, because the penciler, once you had the plot, was the first person and everybody had to follow that. So how much time they all had depended on how much time you spent on it. It was kind of a, if you didn't understand what the protocol was in terms of courtesy to the people on down the line, it had a lot to do with that. You had to have a little bit of sensitivity towards the overall picture even though you were doing part of it you know? So I was good at that, and also I was a good storyteller and that's the thing that attracted Stan. That's why I think I got work there, and I got extensive work because I can tell a really good story. Even though the drawing was kind of like a little bit odd and strange and strange little giant dwarf like Hulk with a big head and all this kind of thing. I still think it beats the big one with the small head, you know the big Hulk with the small head and the fat thighs, that one, it's stupid! (laughter) We had a lot of fun.

Stan would come in at least twice that I can remember. Aside from being jealous of my hair, I mean not to give too many things away, but he was - I mean he's a good looking guy, you know he carried himself well and he was very distinguished looking. But at some point he was replacing some hair with some transplants and all that kind of thing, he was going through that process. I mean everybody in the office knew, we could see it happening. He talked about it openly, he didn't have a problem at all, but I had this dark hair and I always had a lot of it, and he came over once and he went like this on my head [rubs head] "Trimpe I hate you!" (laughter) I wasn't the biggest talker in the cubicle where I worked at first because when I first started to do the *Hulk* I was still in the office, I wasn't working at home. It was myself, John Romita, Tony Mortellero, Marie Severn usually doing some coloring, an empty desk in there for an other artist to come in, on the other side of the hall was Morrie. Marie was over there sometimes, sometimes they have another production assistant in there, and in the back was the copy machine, and the two front offices, one was Stan's and one was John Verpoorten's, which he shared with Roy [Thomas] when Roy came on board. So we had a really good time it was just crazy, I mean I couldn't wait to get to work like the first ten years working at Marvel. I mean I only worked in the office

for about a year, year and a half something like that, the total time since I began. And we had a ball and I was commuting from Peakskill at the time. I just couldn't wait to get there. You know it was so much fun.

But you know we'd get a little raucous sometimes in that cubicle, especially when Frank Giacoia would come in, or Vinnie Colletta especially and you'd get these three Italian guys, Romita, Colleta and Giacoia and it was like something out of the Sopranos you know? And they were funny as hell and they stuff they talked about I can't really repeat. (laughter) I mean Vinnie always had a girlfriend, I don't know if he ever got married I don't know, but he had girlfriends and occasionally bring them up to the office and here were all these babes. Vinnie was a sharp dresser you know, really nice grey wavy hair, he was always immaculately presented. So those guys they were

fun, but sometimes we'd get noisy in there and unfortunately I was the one that was the loudest. I would get blamed all the time, like Stan would come in and say "Trimpe would you please keep it down!" But Stan! Ok, yes boss. (laughter)

The first stories I worked on were plotted by Stan and myself, mostly by Stan, I mean you know they were done in his office, you'd go in for a story conference, talk about what you did last issue, maybe what happened before that, who would be a good villain at that particular point in time. Who haven't we used in a while you know, oh let's try Abomination or whatever you know trying to dovetail somewhat the last part of the last story into the first part, because they want continuing stories per say but they frequently pick up where the other one left off in terms of location. I mean it was a consciousness about that.

RD: So there was some continuity.

HT: So there was some continuity in that sense, at least to my recollection. I never had a written plot, we didn't work from scripts, and you know as far as Jack and Stan went as far as to development of all these characters that are now household names, you know they were just like incredible in terms of how they work together I think. I don't know if it was out of that relationship exactly but Stan's philosophy, and I think this was the revolutionary thing about comics, was the fact that you're not working from full script, which



Shogun Warriors #2

is the way it did previously been done. He believed, even though he was a writer, which it's a hard admission to get out of a writer nowadays, he said it's primarily a picture medium. You need to be a good writer because you need to bridge. You don't duplicate what you see in the picture you know, you compliment it. Recently I've gone over some of the stuff that he's written like in *Thor* and it's fantastic, it's just really good stuff.

He was quite clever you know, and his whole attitude about characters, there was a looseness and an informality to everything, were used. The hip language of the day and all that kind of thing you know? Nobody else had ever done that before, and now with the artist being a director rather than the writer, where we had the responsibility of the pacing, panel size, panel layout, panel structure, so on and so forth, you know it left the artist in a very good

position I thought in terms of creativity, and that's the way I saw the story, I saw them visually. So when we would have a story conference, he wouldn't hand me a plot. I would go out and write down what we had talked about, you know what I remembered and then from that I would lay out 20 pages and add little bits and pieces here and there were I felt I needed something to complete the story or bridge the gaps in the story. I don't remember

Stan ever, after that first issue that Frank laid out, I don't remember him ever having a complaint, a major complaint, about a story in terms of the story telling. I never had major changes to do. I never had a page to do over or anything like that, there was nothing to it. I mean there might have been some small editorial things need to be changed. He did get really pissed off at me one time because in the *Hulk and Sub Mariner* I lettered on the side of the submarine 'Mattel' like in small letters back towards the stern. And he caught that. He said "You don't do this, it's like free advertising. You can't do that." Funny, yeah but don't do that.

RD: Funny also how the world has changed. Back then it would have been considered free advertising, now it would be something you could get sued for.

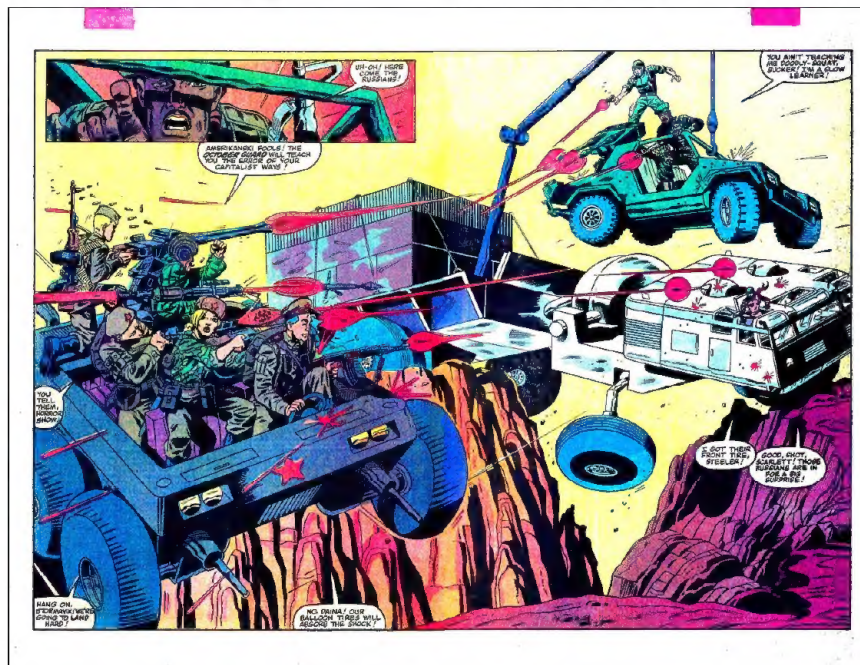
HT: You know that is really weird. You know it's not

easy to live in this country. It takes a lot of like strength to live here and kind of keep up this facade of you know independence and so on, when in fact we're constantly under the gun about something, if it's not you know corporate fascism, it's something like you're describing you know, it's some litigation mania that's just going on now. Fear of everything.

You know we just got back from Spain a couple of weeks ago you know and I have been to Europe before, and I lived in England for a year, and then I mean it was plainly obvious that there was a difference between European type cultures and here. After a while I got thinkin' like, you know, how does Europe remain so important? It's so small, it's a tiny little area broken up into a lot of countries that speak all different languages. What's the influence? Well I think they got something there. They've got culture, plus civilization, plus modern technology and sensible

approaches politically and you know economically to things. I mean the European Common Market is amazing. You couldn't even get a dozen states in the U.S. to agree on some economic standard, let alone, you know what I mean? It's just, it's just crazy. So we're going back over there, you know ever since 9-11 we've got Homeland Security and all this other thing,

everything else knots everything up, and you go over there and it's like all of those things that we feel pressure from here, about your health and your diet and drug ads on T.V. where they know you can't buy them, but you go bug your doctor about it and then he's prescribes it. That's illegal in other countries, you can't do that, it's considered unethical which it is you know? But we let that shit go by the boards and then you know talk about honor and honesty, it's just crazy. And I'm not an expert on foreign countries, but you know it's not like we were just in a pocket at a show. We wanted to go early, we went four days, we went to Barcelona a couple days there, rented a car and drove up and stayed in Pamplona, met people. Those town squares in the old cities you know, where people hang to all hours, and not only that with their kids at two AM, in the middle of the week! (laughter) You couldn't do that here. You'd be overrun by druggies and crime and drunkenness and cops and



G.I. Joe: A Real American Hero #6

sirens all night long. Well one of the guys said you have to care about where you live. I mean everybody has to care about it, not just some people that are trying to make other people care about it you know? There has to be some sort of civic responsibility that's inborn and I think Europeans have that better than we do.

RD: Yeah we're too independent minded. It's still the Wild West out here compared to the rest of the world.

HT: It's the Wild West compared to the rest of the world, yes. It's like Dodge, there's no doubt about it. And I'm sure those cities in their darker parts of town you know, they all have trouble, everybody has their trouble spots and stuff like that you know? People are people you know? And there's poor people and rich people everywhere you know. So I mean generally speaking you couldn't keep areas like that in the U.S. at those hours clear and clean and safe. And you know Barcelona's the same thing and we met people in a same type of area near the hotel in Pamplona. We just met somebody, just a couple - a Spanish woman and her boyfriend they just started talking with us and before you know it they're dragging us around to bars and stuff like that. (laughter) It's like, wait a minute, what is this? The USA, it's a hard land. It's a beautiful land from sea to shining sea, it's a magnificent land mass that we live in, but it's very, very difficult, and yet millions of people still see it as an ideal and a place for opportunity and come here and want to be here.

There I am working at Marvel on staff and hired by Stan because I could tell a story pretty well. A lot of people have asked me you know, were you asked to copy Jack Kirby? And we were never asked to copy anybody, because especially when I was there in the beginning, in those days you could tell the artist by their style. I mean the difference between John Romita and Dick Ayers and Bill Everett or Sid Shores or Sal Buscema, you know you can look at the work and you knew who did it. So it was very diverse that way in terms of style, which I thought was terrific. I mean Steve Ditko you know? I mean it was just great in that respect. But if you wanted to tell a story, what Stan would point out about Jack and Romita is look at the way they pace, look at the way they tell the story, look at the way they move the camera in and out, you know this kind

of thing, it would be more or less that. I mean I would still tell anybody look at Kirby for instance. Kirby never fooled around with page layouts. He had splashes. He had six equal panels on a page, or he had five panels you know, he had four equal panels and one long panel. Sometimes he'd break them up maybe in and succession. But it was all in the composition. It wasn't something to distract your eye. See the panel progression makes it easy to read. I find it very difficult to read a lot of present day comics. I mean I didn't read comics then because I didn't have the patience for it, I was too busy doing them you know? But today I've looked at some comic books and they're just very hard in many cases, not always, but in many cases they're very hard to follow.



Transformers Vol. 1, #12

Well Jack make sure that didn't happen. And all his composition was done in a way where the panel never seemed to confine the work. The panel was more like a window onto a scene that was actually much larger. I don't know how he did it but it happens time and time again. It's the way he cropped, it's the way he did overlapping, and I don't know how the hell he did it. But the sense of Kirby was that each panel in itself was an extravaganza. Only limited necessarily by the straight lines of the border, the panel borders. So I would tell anybody that's breaking into a comics, yes, I don't want to see open panels, I don't want to see - I mean I do it myself, but you know I figure I have a right to it now. (laughter) If I were teaching this type of thing, and I've taught art, and we have done some comic book sections when I was in public school, teaching public school for a couple years, I tell the kids don't get complicated with it you

know, see what you can do inside a very easy to follow progression of panels. And I think it makes you think a little bit more about what's going on inside that space. I mean that being said, I didn't spend a whole lot of time on layouts, I mean usually it was just the first thing that came into my head I put down and if I didn't like it, well next time you know? It's like baseball: you go two-for-four maybe, or two-for-three. You know so I mean I never looked back, I never worried over the work, and sometimes I just batted it out and it looked like hell but you know, it was bold, it was always bold, and I think that counts for something especially when you're using color, and the storytelling was always good. I did have some favorites, there are some issues I look at and I say, you know, that wasn't bad. I was just looking at

Shogun Warriors the other day, some of those that I did. It was very solid you know, almost like Saturday morning animation, cartoon animation you know, which I like again, that kind of thing - storyboarding.

RD: Well you know the way you mention the evaluation of your art like that, to my mind, around the mid-80s, around the time of the *Machine Man* mini series, I thought your art took a pretty big turn for the better at that point. Like you obviously had the solid storytelling, but I thought your rendering got much, much better around that time. Was there any impetus for that?

HT: I think I started to use a pen. I use a brush on all the stuff I do for the shows, but I think I started to use pens then. I remember I did an Ant-Man story which I think was in *Fantastic Four Unlimited* where I actually went back to the brush. It looked good, and the editor of the book at the time said don't use a brush, use a pen. This is old fashioned, this is outdated, using a brush is outdated, that's basically what he said. It is, yeah it looks dated. So you know I have a heavy brush line and with fine feathering but actually on plain finish paper it's way easier, if you can use a brush, it just glides, it like crazy glides. Some of the paper quality now when you use a pen it's like walking on egg shells, because the crowquill digs the paper up, it's not hard enough, I don't know what. And it's still Strathmore 2-ply Bristol and that's what they call it, it's got the stamp in the corner, but I find it just not workable.

RT: So you worked on *Hulk* for a number of years.

HT: Yeah about 8. I did 8.

RT: In that time you worked on a lot of different characters but the one most everyone probably knows is Wolverine. At the time it was probably just another character for you, but go through and describe how that particular issue came about and what came later.

HT: Well you know like all things, it's like getting shot at, you don't realize you're missed until the bullet was way past you. (laughter) You know we worked tight schedules, I might have even been doing something else at the time, because usually what I would try to

do is pick up as much freelance as I could. Because the way it worked was this: I was well out of the office by that time, and the only time I would come into the office was either to deliver artwork or to come in and work on something, you know some particular thing to be done right then and there. Yeah I would have been living in New York, we were living on 27th Street at the time. Marvel moved around two or three times I remember while we were still in the city. We were working deadlines and the deadlines are fairly tight, I mean if you're doing 18 or 20 pages, 22 pages, you know the penciler would technically have ten days to do it primarily, to do those pages. I mean you had to crank it out at two pages a day. I mean there could be some overlapping which did take place. Normally I finished the book. I was able to finish a book before it

went to the writer. For your smoother operation you could pass on to the next stage as you finished the work, which would actually give you more time and you could probably stretch one book out clear to the end of the month if you wanted to you know.

But doing it the way I did it, I inked a lot of the books so I had time to ink it you know. A lot of guys that pencil they just don't have time to ink it when it's finished. But I penciled very, very roughly when I was doing my own inks so that's why it's brush, it's not too detailed stuff. It was done pretty quickly. Stan had no complaints at all you know. I was still struggling. There were stories around the office I remember that John Buscema was not very good when he started and then suddenly he changed overnight, he literally changed overnight. And he started to do these Michelangelo beautiful figure drawings in his

comic art work. I kept waiting for that day to happen. (laughter) I mean that's absolutely the truth. I always had that in the back of my mind, that one of these days I was going to be overcome with this graceful line you know and I was not going to be this cartoonist any more. It never happened. (laughter) But I found ways to cover it up, but it was long after I had finished with the *Hulk*.

So you know we're working fairly tight deadlines and sometimes you're thinking about the next issue before you're even finished with the present one. So when a character comes in, and there were many books were I just created a villain out a whole cloth, you know the writer might have come up with a name or something like that and I would just draw it the way I felt and



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there was very little you know resistance or change or rejection. I don't want to say it wasn't as important then, but it wasn't as pretentious then as it is now you know? It was kinda fun, it was like drawing for fun. You know where you were just doing this and having a good time and you know if it's not perfect, well next time we'll try and do better kind of thing, it was like that. I mean we weren't doing pages with the idea in mind we're going to resell for one thing you know? Nobody cared, except for a few. So Wolverine came along, and I just found out recently in talking to Len [Wein] on a panel that Roy [Thomas] came up with the name Wolverine, which I thought he had frankly. Up until that point people were always asking me "How does it feel to be the creator of Wolverine?" and I would go through the long explanation that I was only a small cog in the machine that brought Wolverine about. And then and I even reached a point where I said I'll just say yeah I did it, I created Wolverine, it was great, I gave it quite a bit of thought, we mulled it over - you know I was going to make up a whole story about it! (laughter). But I told John Romita one day when I saw him at a show last year, I said do people ask you go all the time about Wolverine? And he said "Well I only designed the costume" and I said John, the costume is the character! (laughter) He just laughed you know.

But the concept was Roy's, and the Canadian superhero, the fact that he came from Canada was Roy's idea, and he would be small and feisty and kind of tough like his animal namesake. Then Len took that and developed the character. He described the character in detail in terms of you know what he did, and how those claws work, and all this other kind of stuff, or the fact that he had claws and so on. John took that information and came up with a character and we were all kind of watching it happen you know that kind of thing, and if anybody had a suggestion they might say something. But there wasn't a whole lot of time put into it let's put it that way, or a whole lot of thought. All these things were done rather quickly. I would say that Wolverine was probably more of a community effort than most other throwaway characters, for whatever reason. I heard it had to do with the Canadian market, there was a little bit about going into the Canadian comic book market, or developing a fan base there. I don't know. John did a model sheet, or a character sheet, which I think is

well known now, it's been printed and sold. I've done many recreations of *Hulk* #181, well not many-many but a dozen? Maybe 11 or 12 over the past 10 years or something like that. The last one I did was just a few months ago for a guy in Canada actually and it occurred to me looking at the layout on that cover that I might not have done on the layout, John Romita may have done the layout on that cover. Because Wolverine really looks like one of his figures, it does not look like something that I would have done. Wendigo yeah, it's kinda awkward and straight on and you know it looks like I might have done that, but that over-the-shoulder Hulk, the positioning of his body and all, I said he might have done the rough on this layout. I penciled and inked it and the interior was penciled and inked by me and inked by Jack Able, and I guess everybody knows by now that the interior of the book was lost in the fire. That's a disaster!



Incredible Hulk Vol. 1, #181

RD: What I heard was he lost the house, and there was all this original artwork there - he had that story, the Giant Size #1 cover, and a whole bunch of other artwork of various types as well.

HT: It's ironic because, I think it was at a show in New York last year, my rep Jeff who sells art work on line and at auction, he was at the show and he was helping out and he's helping Ron Wilson and you know he said to Len - Len was sitting right next to me, I had just spilled a whole cup of coffee on him, I had knocked a whole cup of coffee on his briefcase which was on the floor which was partly open. Luckily it was only books and some manuscripts and things like that - and it's almost like too weird when I think about it - and he was upset but he took it with good humor and I was very apologetic of course, you know I tend to do things like that all the

time, knock things over. If it has a high center of gravity I will knock over sooner or later if it's anywhere near me because I fling around my arms a lot. Anyway we clean the mess up and there was no major losses or anything like that. So that worked out OK. And it was at that show Jeff said to Len, why don't you sell it? Len said well you know this is my backup, this is my reserve, this is like my pension so to speak. And Jeff said don't tell me it's in your basement sitting on top of some cabinet or laying on a table and just strewn around somewhere down there you know in a manila envelope or something. Len said well in fact it is. So Jeff went right out and got him a big loose leaf 11x17 plastic and he said

here, put it in there, put it in a safe place. I think they asked him if he had any insurance or anything like that. And the next thing you know, within a matter of weeks, the damn story was gone. It's a disaster really in terms of the historical aspect.

So I drew Wolverine, who appeared in the last panel in Hulk #180, and then in the next story. So I had quite a bit of leeway in showing how the character was presented given the information I had. The thing is the drawing is always the last word anyway, so you know I'm the one that gets asked to draw the pictures of Wolverine and nobody else. Well I mean I'm sure John gets requests for to draw the character. That was basically it you know, it was just on to the next title. There was no clap of thunder or flash of light or trumpets, no nothing, it was just, the life expectancy of a character like that might be a couple of the issues best. Or if it's fairly interesting to writers they might pop it back in maybe in a couple of months or a couple years later, you bring the character back in some form or other. I mean we all know that Wolverine did not hit his stride until he became an X-Man and was redesigned and reinvented in a way you know. We actually saw a human being inside that, well what became a non-outfit actually. (laughter) There was something I was very conscious of at the very beginning at Marvel and that was that they own the work, and there were no concessions in the terms of, or compromises, in terms of that. We got reprint money yes but it was call incentive.

I was pretty much out of the loop in terms of, as I mentioned before, in terms of comics and Patricia - our anniversary was this past Saturday in Baltimore - she knew nothing about comics, comics was not her world to say the least, or comic book superheroes would probably, if she had to go see a movie, not only it would be the last movie on the list but she would probably skip it. You know they didn't have time for that stuff. She still watches the kinds of movies that I used to watch in my 20s which were good movies. Kind of you know that had some sort of meaning in artistic value to them. On the other hand last night for the first time we watched the second *Hulk* movie on DVD and you thought...? [Patricia responds off-camera] She liked it and I liked it and I thought it was pretty good. I thought the first one was awful in many ways, but this one is very faithful to the, it was more faithful to the Hulk that I knew, which is saying something. There was a lot of Hulk in there that was from the 60s and 70s I think, and I enjoyed that, that was fun to watch.

RT: Especially that whole scene with the Hulk vs. the military in the park. Every time I see that scene I think of your Hulk and the stuff you did in the comic.

HT: Yeah you know what, at that point I said this is like right out of a comic book, this is awesome. So you know she [Patricia] says you've got to get back in here and go to these show that people want, because I was always getting invitations you know here and there. I got more once I started to go to the shows and she said well go, we'll go to the shows, you can meet people you haven't seen in a while and talk to folks that are still working and kinda get to know what's going on again and have some fun you know. Go to different places and party down you know and have a good time! So she's pretty much responsible for that because I didn't do a lot of shows when I was working because I just wasn't interested in it. Now I'm interested in it. Not only do we get to spend some time together, it's become a source of income to some degree you know partially, because really my only guaranteed income right now is Social Security

so if anybody is on Social Security and is watching this you know exactly what I'm talking about. It's money but it's not a lot. And nobody can live on it, I mean it would be impossible to live on it. You know since I worked so many years and put so much into it I took it early at 60 so I'm not getting as much as I would have if I had to waited until 65. But it's not that much difference, it's like 1300 bucks a month. Now that's a nice little chunk of



Original John Romita Character Design Sheet

change if you're working, you know so I'm working, I try to work through art sales through Jeff, and occasionally through myself at shows, and commission work and that's it. So far in the last couple years it's been good, it works. And obviously you know anybody that was in the business that has a fan base, that fan base is limited, because every artist has their own group of people, and they overlap to some degree in certain areas but you know they have their own group of people.

I was very fortunate in a couple ways. One was I would take on a series that other people weren't interested in, namely the licensed books. When they came up I fell into it somehow and I believe the reason was because it wasn't cool to do those you know? *G.I. Joe* wasn't cool, *Transformers* wasn't cool, *Godzilla* wasn't cool, you know that kind of thing. And of course the Hulk and now with the Wolverine tacked on there as an addendum, I have a very broad base of interest on account of that. I'm not just a one character guy. For an individual who you know can't

draw like John Buscema or Jim Lee I've done very well I think. Again I think I was very fortunate. We need to thank our higher power or reasonable facsimile thereof for that kind of fortune.

RT: Well I've seen that at the shows, you quite frequently have lines almost the whole time, every day.

HT: That doesn't happen all the time. I have found that we do the best in the Midwest. The Ohio show and also in Baltimore, I don't know why. But generally speaking, the east coast and the Northeast, New York City in particular, not so good. We do much better at strictly comic book shows, or limited you know, there might be some toys and things like that, but we've been three years in a row in Baltimore which is not the best thing in the world to do you know because how many people are going to want a drawing? It's probably a good idea to mix them up and not go to too many. I mean the first year we jumped in on shows I think we did 14 in a year, and that was very, very difficult to do. I mean it was exciting for a while, but then we were committed to some of them towards the end of the year and I really didn't want to go you know. And then last year it got even worse, I canceled - I was so busy, you know my mom moved in with us early last year, so it was a lot of stuff going on, and I had flooding in the basement and I mean it was all kinds of stuff. We were working on the house trying to get it livable. There was many, many, many things that we had had to pay attention to, and I canceled a bunch of shows left and right to the point that Jeff said you know if you keep canceling you're not going to get invited because they're not going to trust you. I mean I gave them their money back, they bought airplane tickets and I sent the money back for the tickets you know I didn't stick them for the tickets at all.

The only person I stuck for the tickets was Chandler Rice in Las Vegas and I feel so sorry for him because I offered and he said no, no you know, right up until the last minute. That was during a period that our dry well backed up and flooded the basement. Three days before the Las Vegas thing I told Chandler I said, you know I can't make it. I said you better cancel now and I'll pay you for whatever the fee is, and he said no I'm going to keep the tickets until the last minute. Things didn't get better because the guy

couldn't come in until two weeks later to fix it you know. So that was the Las Vegas story, and then there was the elbow, and I canceled a lot of shows. Come the end of the year estimated taxes and all and it got like hairy. Everything that somebody asked me to do in October, we've been booked like every weekend. The most we'd ever done in the past is two consecutive weekends, which would seem like grueling. But once we set our mind to this - we had a break between Montreal and Columbus Ohio, but Montreal we got home from Spain on a Monday and Friday we were driving to Montreal! (laughter) And you know we don't make any money in Montreal, but it's a great bunch of people up there and we love them. We like to see the city and we have a good time and they take everybody out to dinner. I can't say no, they're our friends now, Oscar and his girlfriend.



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Because of a combination of a lot of things having to do with the show invitations, I mean blew Pittsburg off the second year in a row on account of all this stuff going on around here and Renee she's very nice and I feel bad about it. Gary Friedrich was telling me about how great that show was and I said I will probably never get an invite back there. Everybody I've talked to said it's a great show and I said just to pay her back I probably should just you know go and buy table space. Then we have one November in Albany and we go up there because it's close, it's small. It's amazing we did really well in Albany. We did better in Albany that we ever did in New York. There's no predicting it. It's so weird. You think of the comic book world, the fandom, as something that's pretty even across the board but it's not.

There's pockets of differences that are very distinct. And they seem to be consistent within themselves. You know I was a big journal keeper and I wish I'd kept a journal on shows and at least taken some notes so you remember what happened there, because I think it would make an interesting study, the whole comic book shows scene. You know the way the new different promoters approach it, and the people that come, as well will the philosophy of the show itself. Each show seems to have its own little bit of philosophy you know which is kind of fun.

This interview is taken from the video interview conducted with Joe and can be found on Creator Chronicles: The Interviews 2007-2014, available on Bluray and a limited-edition signed DVD. For more information or to order this Bluray, please visit <http://www.amdalemedia.com/ccvideo.shtml>.

From Batman to Gotham:

50 years of Comic Book TV Heroes

Part 1 - The 60s to the 90s



Of all the mediums to interpret comic books into, television seems like it would have been the most obvious. Yet it would take decades from the inauguration of TV in the late 40s before it would be possible to fully adapt comic books to that medium. In this series of articles, we will take a look at the evolution of comic book heroes on TV.

Television was barely out of its post-war infancy when the granddaddy of all super-heroes made the leap to the small screen. *The Adventures of Superman* debuted in 1952 in glorious black and white, establishing the first beachhead of comic books on TV. For 6 years the home viewer was treated to the thrilling exploits of the Man of Steel beamed directly to their living room. The show hewed pretty closely to the established comic book cannon, though it did take some liberties with Superman's powers, ascribing to him weird powers like phasing through walls and splitting himself into two beings.

Casting got off to a strong start with popular B-movie actor George Reeves playing Clark/Superman in what would be a career-defining role. Handsome, articulate, and with a sharp wit, Reeves' Clark Kent is no shrinking violet and often takes a hand in the action before switching to Superman. Reeves, charming and likeable, fits the role perfectly bringing just the right touch to a hugely popular character.

Sadly, the role of a lifetime did not sit as well with Reeves. Initially the role didn't pay very much, leaving Reeves with little incentive and contributed to his lingering money problems. After the second season, he was seeking other opportunities but a substantial pay raise brought him back, but this pay raise was a mixed bag. While the sum of \$5,000 per week was very good, it was only for the time of production of the show. Due to budget constraints and economizing the production of the show, filming was done quickly with many parts of episodes filmed all at once. For instance, most of the scenes in Perry White's office would be filmed back to back within a few days. Thus the actual total production time of a season was only about 8 weeks.

Reeves was constantly trying to get other work, but the huge popularity of the show made it difficult for him to get any role other than that of Superman. Indeed, he even played Superman (and himself, sort of) in a famous episode of *I Love Lucy* in 1957. Reeves unfortunately considered his career to be wasting away

and his many attempts to get his own productions off the ground or secure other roles proved limited or fruitless. Tragically, Reeves would die at the age of 45 in 1959 in a shooting death that is still controversial and that would ultimately be ruled a suicide, but would leave many unanswered questions.

Lois Lane was initially played by Phyllis Coates, who imbued Lois with a tough-as-nails attitude and hell-bent on out-reporting Clark Kent. Due to scheduling conflicts with another project, Coates had to be replaced starting with the second season so Noel Neil was brought in, who had played Lois in the previous Superman serials. Neil brought a little more latitude to the character, softening some of Coates' uncompromising qualities and making her more sympathetic, though she did tend to get written into damsel-in-distress situations often. While not entirely fearless, she could nevertheless stand her ground with Clark and Perry, and give the criminals what-for.



The main cast, in glorious black and white

Neil would subsequently be the actress most associated with the Lois Lane character until the *Superman* movies in the 70s and 80s with Margot Kidder. Sadly, Noel Neil just passed away recently, but her portrayal will live on as one of the defining character portrayals of the comic book television age.

Jack Larson played Jimmy Olsen and while he was ostensibly playing a young cub reporter and photographer, Larson had an old-soul quality and look about him, which let him play less of a subservient or background role that might have occurred with

another actor. Jimmy is all spitfire and go-get-em and gets into a lot of comedic trouble, but Larson is also able to bring bravery and righteous investigation to the character in some cases.

Rounding out the primary cast were John Hamilton as Daily Planet editor Perry White, and Robert Shayne as Inspector Henderson, a character created on the radio series brought over to TV. Hamilton's Perry White is perhaps the best portrayal of the character. He is all fast talking and immediacy, a whirlwind of orders and expectations. When Perry says jump, you jump! Hamilton's portrayal could nearly be seen as a proto J. Jonah Jameson, except without all the anti-hero vitriol. He certainly has the histrionics and "Go! NOW!" bluster down in a similar manner. Many would try to recapture Hamilton's method, but no one could quite do it as well.

Effects are simplistic, even by the standards of the day, which is to be expected. They have a charm all their own, but given the nascent TV landscape and limited technology of the time, many of the effects boil down to Superman “flying” by running toward the camera and leaping over it with the aid of a springboard, then having Reeves lay on a board and filmed against some kind of moving sky image, as well as showcasing feats of strength and being largely impervious to bullets. The bullet effects are simple but effective: essentially Superman stands there stock still while



Super-Levitation - a decidedly non-standard power on display

the bad guys blaze away, represented by animated sparks appearing over Superman’s torso. This is usually followed by the bad guys throwing the gun at him, which he then *ducks away from!* Ah well, you can’t have everything. Still this was ground breaking stuff for the 50s, especially TV which at the time was mostly glorified radio plays acted out on a single set or stage.

The first season had a very gritty, violent, noir-ish feel to it. Comic writer and editor Whitney Ellsworth served as an associate producer and story editor, largely uncredited for the first season, and it would be under his direction that the tone would shift to a less violent, more fun and science fiction bent. A more sentimental and jovial attitude led to many stories being more about Superman’s personal issues than fighting bad guys.

Though filmed in black and white for its first 2 years and in color thereafter, it was only broadcast in black and white during its initial run. It wasn’t until years later, in 1965, that syndicated reruns finally showed the episodes in color. The classic opening narration, “faster than a speeding bullet!” that everyone could recite for years, was never a part of the comics and also came from the radio dramas. It was full of life and patriotism, and is a perfect example of counter programming for the communist threat that loomed over everything in the pre-cold war era.

It was really barely a super hero show when you get right down to it, consisting mostly of Superman playing cops and robbers with

an assortment of generic criminals which would get simpler and sillier as the series wore on. But it was Superman, on TV, for free, and it had unique charm even by 50s TV standards.

While Superman was always a popular character in the comics, just a few years prior to this time comic books featuring the Captain Marvel character outsold everything else, and many other heroes were huge hits as well. In this postwar period landscape, comics were diversifying into many other genres such as romance and westerns, and costumed heroes had waned in popularity. Superman, while recognized as a catalyst, was not entirely the big kahuna of superherodom, and superherodom was starting to be considered passé and old hat.

The show was a sensation, a smash far bigger than the producers expected, and was probably the single event that propelled Superman to the top tier of superheroes in the mind of the general public. The high visibility of the show may also have contributed somewhat to the later Silver Age costumed super hero revival of 1956-1959. Nevertheless, *The Adventures of Superman* remained a staple of weekly morning kids TV for many years and for a decade it was the only super hero TV show around.

If *The Adventures of Superman* was a sensation, *Batman* (1966) was bona fide cultural touchstone, one that resonates even to this day. It was a rare prime-time show, airing twice a week with two half-hour episodes split by a cliffhanger ending. Running just 3 years, it defined the term “comic book” to most people, for better or worse, with its colorful, pun-laced, rock-em sock-em action and portraying its characters in all their full costumed glory.



The main cast - this time in glorious, living color!

Taking a decidedly light and comedic tone, but with a unique and specific style about it, *Batman* met with great response from the general public, but at the expense of reflecting most of the roots of the character. In fact the comic *Batman* would change in some ways to borrow elements from the show, at least for a while.

The show was very much an artifact of its time, a slick, hip, modern take for the mod crowd and with an immediately identifiable 60s look and feel. The music was influenced by the surf movement of the time, with lots of staccato guitars and horns

filling the soundscape. The ultra-catchy theme is a classic and for a couple of decades after the show went off the air, it was known by virtually everyone. Many can either hum or sing it. The larger than life fantastical elements extended to the use of things like literal comic lettering pasted over the image during fights. The famous Pow! Zap! Bam! accompanied by musical stingers was so different and singular that it has become a staple reference for almost any article or news item about comic books in general that appear in news media. This causes much consternation even to this day, as it seems to portray comics and their fans as childish simpletons.



The Caped Crusader and The Boy Wonder

The show was ever only supposed to be spoof, and camp, and it certainly fulfilled that aim with relish. This was taken to ludicrous heights with the absurd amount of items Batman always seems to be able to pull out of his utility belt. The "Bat-This" and "Bat-That" devices became something like what we would call a meme these days.

The great irony of this show is that Batman here is more like classic Superman in his characterization. His Bruce Wayne is a dapper socialite who acts more like Clark Kent in confrontations, shying away or calling for help. His Batman is full Boy Scout with his "Hello, citizen!" demeanor and strict adherence to the law. This is no vigilante acting outside the justice system. Batman works hand-in-glove with Commissioner Gordon, openly helping the overtly helpless police with the scourge of super villains. And what villains! Unlike most comic book shows, Batman featured a full rogues gallery of Batman's classic villains, as well as a few new ones created just for the show. So popular were the villains that people would tune in each week with great anticipation to witness their antics. Every effort was made to bring these characters to life, right down to excellent costumes and performances. The show would secure known actors to play the villains, and they would be considered plum roles to land. Many great actors would come aboard, such as Frank Gorshin as the Riddler, Burgess Meredith as Penguin, and Roddy McDowall as Bookworm, but two standouts were Cesar Romero as The Joker and Julie Newmar as Catwoman.

Cesar Romero was a classically trained actor, a true star of both the big and small screen. He was reluctant to take the role, but was partially convinced when it was revealed that the villains

would actually be as important characters in the series as Batman. His trademark laugh, so mimicked in one way or the other by everyone since, was a serendipitous accident. Romero was looking through conceptual art and found it so absurd he burst out into a parody of a manic laugh. The producers liked it so much they requested he use it and the rest is history. He was the first to portray this classic character, and his performance is full-out, to-the-hilt, no-holds-barred lunacy. His Joker was definitive and the model by which all subsequent portrayals were fundamentally based on.

Several actresses played Catwoman over the run of the show and the "movie" and everyone has their favorite, but it was Julie Newmar who would come to embody the role. Newmar brought a cool, slinky sensuousness to her constant attempts to tempt Batman away from the side of good. Though sorely tempted, Batman always walked the straight and narrow, and refused to succumb to her charms.

The primary roles of Batman and Robin went to Adam West and Burt Ward. Others were considered for Bruce Wayne/Batman, but none of them quite had that perfect pitch of playfulness and earnest delivery that West brought to the table. West knew how to modulate his voice to maximum effect, giving his Batman subtle



Mee-YOW! Temptation never looked so good!

character in a show that was about as subtle as buckets of paint thrown onto a wall. He also played things razor-straight, and let all the silliness happen around him. His line delivery would become iconic in its own right, up there with William Shatner's unique performances.

When you think about it, it makes sense to do a show about Batman. Except for the gadgets and the sets, there isn't much that would be needed in the way of special effects. Indeed, the show even plays with this by having Batman and Robin climb up the side of a building (using Bat-Grappling hooks, naturally) which is accomplished by simply turning the camera sideways and having

the actors mime climbing! Simple, effective, and most importantly within the capabilities of 60s TV special effects technology and budget. Costumes and sets were also relatively straightforward to do for a show like this. The production design of the show is exceptional, and attention to detail high.

The show was in color and shot with vivid cinematography. Filmed in bright day-glo colors and Dutch angles, oh the Dutch angles! Virtually any scene featuring the villains or conflict were completely dominated by Dutch angle filming, where the camera is locked to a 45 degree angle. This method was so overused that is basically killed of any use of the technique until Joel Schumacher would revive it and the campiness for the howlingly bad *Batman and Robin* in 1997.



Even Allies Can't Trust The Joker

Batman had a cultural impact few shows of any kind ever attain. It spawned countless pop-culture references, many of which are still in use to this day. It was so immense a term was coined to describe its impact: Bat-Mania. Adam West, in full Batman regalia, was even on the cover of *Life* in one of the strangest and most memorable covers that magazine ever had. The comic themselves were even altered to adopt the tone and accessibility of the show, a case of art imitating life and not for the better.

So much of the show has become iconic, from the villains to the Batmobile, to the overall tone of the show and to the actors themselves. It made instant stars out of Adam West and Burt Ward, perhaps too big as they had difficulty finding any work not related in some way to *Batman*. The one time it should have happened, and would have been an amazing touch back, was during the first *Batman* movie in 1989. At one point there was talk, or possibly it was just a big outcry by the fans, to have Adam West play young Bruce's father, Thomas Wayne. This would have been an amazing coup in what was already an amazing movie.

But the flame that burns brightest burns shortest. The show was cancelled by 1968 as tastes and interest had reversed that fast. The fallout was immediate. The show that had been the media darling, the show everyone had to watch, was now subject to derision. The comics had it even worse. By having committed to the new direction of the show, they had undermined much of the "new look" direction instituted by Carmine Infantino that saved the *Batman* comics from cancellation in 1964. As a direct result of

this sudden withdrawal of support, Neal Adams was given a shot at the character he had been wanting, to do his way in *Brave and the Bold* #79, a team up with *Deadman*. Together with writer Bob Haney, Adams portrayed Batman in a more serious light, with a dramatic story that was free of most of the silliness that had grown up around the character since the 50s. This would lead directly to Adams teaming up with writer Denny O'Neil a few years later for their classic series on the *Batman* comic, returning the character to his pulpy roots. Batman has been The Dark Knight ever since.

Batman has the unique distinction of being both lambasted for being so silly and campy while at the same time looked back on fondly and is considered a watershed show for comics on TV. It propelled the *Batman* character to the forefront of popular super heroes, a position he holds to this day.

Coming just 6 years after the end of the *Batman* TV show, *Wonder Woman* hit the airwaves on ABC in the form of a 1974 made-for-tv-movie-slash-pilot as a tryout for a series. A prior attempt was made in 1967 to create a *Wonder Woman* show on the heels of *Batman*, but only a few minutes of footage were ever filmed and it was never completed.

Starring a blonde Kathy Lee Crosby as *Wonder Woman* and eschewing most of the comic book aspects like the super powers and costume, it plays more like the "Diana Prince Secret Agent" period of the comics than the traditional, and more well know, super heroine with the golden lasso era. While this pilot received respectable-but-not-stellar ratings or critical acclaim, it was nevertheless successful enough to warrant the commissioning of a second pilot just one year later.

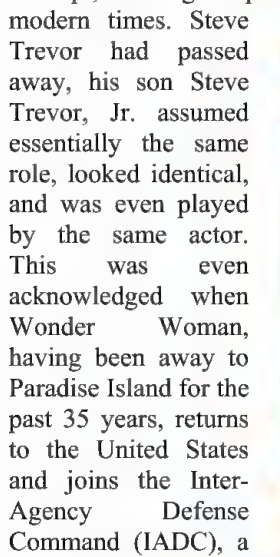


The Dynamic Duo and Batgirl

Airing in November of 1975, the second *Wonder Woman* movie was a smash and ABC put two one hour specials into production immediately. These also had big ratings, so the network ordered an additional 11 episodes. These first 3 pilot/specials would eventually be combined with the 11 episodes to form the first season. The subsequent episodes were aired every few weeks apart during the start of the 1976 TV season starting in September until finally settling into a weekly schedule after mid-December. Despite the scattered schedule, interest and response ran very high throughout the run.

Wonder Woman was a fun show. Colorful and very true to the comic, it even featured an opening credit sequence that mimicked animated comic book panels and had a catchy, high-energy theme song. If you know it, you are probably humming it and good luck getting it out of your head now! Also giving a nod to the comic origins, location changes during each episode were shown as comic style text boxes, such as "Meanwhile" or "Washington, D.C." Transitions and commercial breaks were demarked by an animated starburst sequence. All of these would feature into the first season only, which was placed in 1942, the original time period of the character.

With the second season came a change of time period within the show and a change of network. ABC took too long in deciding on renewal, so it lapsed and CBS took over and changed the name to *The New Adventures of Wonder Woman*. From the second season onward, the show would be less overtly like a comic book, eschewing everything except the central characters and basic concept, ditching the period setting, and bringing the show up to modern times. Steve Trevor had passed away, his son Steve Trevor, Jr. assumed essentially the same role, looked identical, and was even played by the same actor. This was even acknowledged when Wonder Woman, having been away to Paradise Island for the past 35 years, returns to the United States and joins the Inter-Agency Defense Command (IADC), a sort of FBI/CIA hybrid, of which Steve Jr. was the head of.



Lynda Carter, The Original Wonder Woman

Along with the updated timeframe came an alteration to the types of stories told. The stories became more of a contemporary, police style of show, which was more common in TV of that time. In the first season, Wonder Woman performed many physical stunts and feats of strength, but her offensive repertoire was strictly limited to shoving, pushing or throwing bad guys around, as well as using the lasso to capture and interrogate the bad guys. This restriction would be loosened from season two onward and she was allowed to be more physical, throwing some punches and kicks.

By the time the third season started airing, more significant changes were being made to the show that pulled it even more away from the source material, including granting Wonder Woman additional powers like telepathy with animals, and featuring more topical subjects and young adults as main characters in the stories. The budding romance with the original Steve Trevor died with his character, as no one wanted to attempt having her pine for the man's son.

Even with the changes, the core of the character remained mostly intact. Except for bowing a little to convention in her attraction and pining for Steve Trevor, Wonder Woman translated to the small screen with most of her feminine independence intact. She embodies the virtues of the Amazonian ideal: strength, kindness, intelligence, justice, mercy and so on. The interesting aspect of the role reversal with Steve Trevor, whereby he is usually the one that gets captured or in trouble and rescued by Wonder Woman, also plays well here, though mostly only in the first season.

One can trace the beginning of DC Comics excellent casting track record right to this show. While Adam West was a very good Batman for the type of show they were doing, the take on the character was too off the wall and stylized to be considered an iconic representation. For *Wonder Woman* ABC found the perfect casting choice: Miss World America 1972 winner Lynda Carter. Widely renowned as a stunning beauty, Carter also brought a real strength and compassion to the role. Lyle Waggoner, recently from *The Carol Burnett Show*, was cast as Steve Trevor and despite all the changes to his character over the course of the show he does a fine job as both Wonder Woman's sometime love interest and Diana Prince's boss.

During this mid-70s period, we also had a couple of live-action kids shows: *Spidey Super Stories* on Sesame Street and *The Shazam!/Isis Hour* on Saturday morning TV. On Sesame Street, Spidey would appear occasionally in short vignettes with children and animated elements. He would not speak, but rather animated word balloons would appear above his head, thus ensuring children would have to learn to read to understand what he was saying. The costume was very well done, even if the Ditko-eyes were bit narrow, and the actor who portrayed him, Danny Seargren, fit the look of the character, and the segments were fun and lively. Of other note is that Morgan Freeman played the character of Easy Reader in the series, and was the narrator starting in the very first Super Stories episode which aired in 1974.



The other show, *The Shazam!/Isis Hour* ran for three seasons starting in 1974 and consisted of two half-hour segments for each character. *The Secrets of Isis* starred Joanna Cameron as a resurrected Egyptian superheroine with her alter ego being that of a schoolteacher. This was an original creation for TV, but a comic book was put out by DC for a while during the run of the show.

Shazam! carried over the basics of the character and his origin and super powers, but little else. Billy Batson is supposed to be a minor adolescent and the actor who portrays him, Michael Gray, looks 20 years old easily. He is accompanied by a mentor named

Mentor, played by Jackson Bostwick and then John Davey, as they travel around the country in an RV together. This being the 70s, no one batted an eye at such an arrangement, something that would surely have to be altered were it made today. No super villains appeared and the emphasis was on helping people out of problems of their own making, with little violence.

Both shows were obviously for children, and had simple stories and moral lessons. They are looked back at affectionately today, even though they were pretty far off the mark as adaptations of comic material.

The 70s were a turbulent time for comics, full of change and challenges, failures and some measure of success. In the late 70s, Marvel embarked on a major expansion into other forms of media and merchandising. One of these initiatives resulted in licensing the rights to several Marvel properties for TV, which ultimately led to Marvel dominating the 70s for super hero live-action TV shows.

The initial series that came out of this initiative, *The Amazing Spider-Man*, arrived in 1977 as a 2-hour TV movie special. It aired in September of 1977 and was a giant ratings success being the highest rated CBS show of the whole year. However, it missed in the important adult demographic, a condition that would

plague the show throughout its entire run. CBS picked the series up tentatively with only a 5 episode order which it then aired at the end of the season in April and May of 1978. CBS became even more cautious due to the expense of the show and the ratings miss in the adult demo, making only 7 more episodes and airing them sporadically during critical period such as sweeps week. By 1979, the show was cancelled having only aired 13 episodes total over 2 seasons. Even though it still had good ratings, CBS by this time had gotten nervous as they had pretty much every super hero show on their network. They had Spider-Man, The Incredible Hulk, Wonder Woman, Captain America, Doctor Strange and even aired the DC Shazam/Isis series. The network felt it might be pigeonholed as a superficial comic book/super hero network, and they had dumped everything but Incredible Hulk by 1979.

The effects on the show are, well, interesting at least. Wall crawling is a mixed bag. One method involves moving Spidey up the wall on cables, which are (usually) cleverly hidden in corners and creases in the building, but can sometimes be seen. Still, it's very effective, as it allows Spidey to be in the same shot as other people, moving quickly up the sheer vertical face of a building. The other main method involves a horrid blue-screen matting effect which has Spidey superimposed over a building, usually a down-facing view, as he crawls around sideways and in other directions. This method is pretty bad, as the shots of Spidey often

don't match the background in terms of lighting or scale, and often have a washed-out appearance with no shadow. Spidey looks like a bad weatherman overlay on the evening news. This was state-of-the-art for TV in 1977 though, so it was the best that could be done, but it looked a bit cheap even then.

The other big effect, Spidey's "web" shooter, is a huge bracelet looking thing on his wrist that "shoots" out a single thick rope. Granted it would have been quite difficult then to truly do a fine web coming out, but it was possible even if it was something as cheesy as running the camera in reverse, which they do anyway for this effect. It's pretty laughable to anyone even remotely familiar with how Spidey's web is supposed to work. It is even worse when he tries to make a real web with multiple ropes. Swinging is minimal and rarely done. At least he built the web shooters himself.

Peter Parker here is a university student, which is good because the actor portraying him, Nicholas Hammond, looks to be about



What a Tangled Web We Weave...Sort of

30 and while a fine actor who does a good job with the role, could never have passed for a teenager. The rest of the cast does a good-enough job given this is 70s TV made by non-comic people, but their roles and performances are too generic to stand out compared to the comic.

The origin is well done and mostly follows the comic. Everything after that deviates from the comic into mid-70s TV schlock drama. The show was a prime example of how elements of an adaptation from one medium to another end up being altered in order to make the show work. This period was the first significant attempt to bring many popular characters to TV, and the growing pains showed as they typically only resembled their comic book sources in the broad strokes, with the details falling to TV convention and thus undermining the uniqueness and strength of the source material. To be sure, some of this is practical and unavoidable, such as effects and locales, but when things are altered too much, even the non-fan audience can tell and the show suffers because of it.

The Amazing Spider-Man also suffered from a lack of any comic book villains - a condition endemic to every comic show in this period - juvenile and dumbed-down characterizations, a sometimes slap-dash feel, and pedestrian stories that felt like a cookie-cutter version of any other drama or crime show on TV at the time. The approach needed would require a fidelity to the spirit of the material and a thorough understanding of what makes these colorful creations popular. This would largely not occur until nearly two decades later, and then it would finally take root and permeate most attempts from there on.

The most successful, and critically acclaimed, of all of these 70s-era comic TV shows was *The Incredible Hulk*, which ran for 5 seasons from 1978-1982 plus a few TV movie sequels. The show scored a strong casting choice with Bill Bixby, who displayed some excellent dramatic acting chops after being somewhat pigeon-holed after the TV comedy *My Favorite Martian*. Bixby was a very accessible actor, someone that could let the audience in to the character and what he is experiencing. He brought an intelligence, and sometimes a wit, to a role that could have been generic, and gave as good a rendering of a comic character as has ever been on TV.

Many big bodybuilders and strongmen were considered for the role of the Hulk, which was not an easy part to cast. Former two-time Mr. Universe and Mr. America Lou Ferrigno was selected as the giant green monster. Ferrigno, who was six feet, five inches of huge, rippling muscle, seemed much larger thanks to camera angles and the power of suggestion. Though mostly deaf from an early childhood trauma, Ferrigno persevered with both bodybuilding and his pursuit of acting. The Hulk was one of his childhood heroes, so it was a fitting that he would be tapped to play the role. He brought a surprising sensitivity to the Hulk's quieter moments, and a sufficiently ferocious growl when enraged.

It had already been decided that the Hulk in the show would not speak, not even the minimalist way he did in the comic, so this aided Ferrigno by default allowing him to focus his acting in the physical realm. Though Ferrigno was relatively new to acting, he pulled off the many layers of the role convincingly. His Hulk conveys much through body language, motion, and yes, bellowing but also through facial expression and gentle gestures in both quiet and loud times.

The other principal character was that of reporter Jack McGee, played with sincerity and tenacity by Jack Colvin. McGee was created for the TV show to obsessively pursue the Hulk, and subsequently Banner, throughout the series, giving the show an overarching story arc and some overall momentum. The threat of pursuit and discovery lent the show some inherent drama, especially with the many close-calls and the final revelation of the Hulk to McGee. An opportunistic antagonist, McGee sees the Hulk as his ticket out of the diminished pit his career had become. McGee had an actual character arc throughout the series, where he changes some of his stance and opinion during the show, a rarity for 70s episodic TV where the usual course is 'no thing is changed significantly from last week.'

The show was the kind of hit that producers of comic shows had always been seeking, one that crossed over and was watched by more than just the core comics audience. Aside from the difficulty in finding a convincing physical specimen to play the Hulk, the show was another that was fairly easy to adapt to TV with little compromise from the source. While the Hulk doesn't tear down skyscrapers or leap from city to city, he still exhibits many feats of strength and endurance. Alterations were relatively minor, owing mostly to the fact that the only major component of the comic was Banner/Hulk, but one of the changes led to some controversy. Given the times, it was decided to change the character's name to David, as Bruce was perceived to be too effeminate, not masculine enough. Most everyone, even at the time, thought this was ridiculous and a non-issue, but the decision stuck. Also Banner would change his last name in every episode to avoid identification and capture. So one week he was "David Banion" and another he was "David Benson" and so on. It was a relatively clever conceit that made sense in the context of the show with a man on the run. For the limits of TV and the effects of the time, this was one of the more effective shows, similar to Wonder Woman in its adaptation of the fantasy of comics to the limits of reality.



Lou Ferrigno as a convincing Hulk

The show played more from the dramatic man/monster dynamic and the tragic elements more so than slam-bang action. In the pilot, Dr. David Banner runs an experiment on himself using Gamma radiation in an effort to unlock hidden strength in the human body that occurs under times of high stress. The experiment fails with no discernable results, until he has a flat tire on the way home at night in a rainstorm. Frustrated with his apparent failure

in the lab and growing increasingly angry with his attempt to change the tire in a downpour, his anger flares and triggers a massive physical transformation. Banner has found the hidden strength, but it comes wrapped in the body of a monster fuelled by rage! The Jekyll/Hyde dynamic, the tragedy of what Banner has become, and his subsequent pursuit of understanding his condition and attempts to reverse it are the underpinnings of what the show was built on. It was a very different take on super heroes from what came before, dealing more with the psychology and emotion of the internal nature of the character than with daring-do and crime fighting in costumes.

The Incredible Hulk was a rare show, one that not only got the core of the character right but added a few sensible additions that enhanced the overall show. It was a literate and serious drama, one that would point the way for future comic book TV shows.

The great irony of that is that this would be the last live-action Marvel super hero on TV until the new century.

Of special note are the various "TV Movies" that occurred during this period. Often these would be promoted as a movie-of-the-week or some other special event, but were in fact a combined two-part episode from a series edited as a two hour "movie" with some minimal editing done to trim the time to make room for more commercials. In a few cases as shown above, like *Wonder Woman* and *The Incredible Hulk*, the pilot and some early episodes were broadcast in this format and then later incorporated in the episode list of the first season. Then there were the true TV movies like the *Captain America* and *Dr. Strange* examples that were stand-alone two-hour broadcasts not tied to any series. Most of these were practically free for the networks, since they were just re-used material, but the last two were not successful, and coming right at the end of the 70s this left *The Incredible Hulk* as the only show of any kind standing going into the next decade.

With such a great head-start from several notable series at the end of the 70s one would think the 80s would have been a golden age of comic book super heroes on TV. Alas, the reality is that everyone pulled back due to the recession and while many plans were put into motion for various TV and movie projects, almost the entire decade was devoid of comic book TV shows. In fact, *The Incredible Hulk*, which would end its run in 1982 and then do a few TV movies after that, was the last live-action Marvel anything on television until the next century.

DC was not far behind. Notching only a single live-action show in the 80s, *Superboy* in 1988 would nearly bear the flag alone for the entire decade. The show was a well done, though very simplified and Saturday morning friendly, half-hour version of Clark Kent in college. It was well cast and produced, with decent if unspectacular effects that got better, and was generally well received. It ran for 4 seasons in syndication and is notable as being the first TV series to be produced by the new Disney/MGM Studio for its first season, then moved to Universal to become its first weekly televised series.

John Haymes Newton was cast as the Boy of Steel but after the first season was replaced after underwhelming the shows producers and demanding a big pay raise along with a very public DUI arrest. Gerard Christopher would take over the role for the rest of the series and would grow into the role, especially as Clark

Kent. Stacy Haiduk did a great job as an investigative Lana Lang and stole the hearts of comic fanboys everywhere.

The show was fun and drew quite a bit from the source comics, making it a faithful and sincere adaptation of the character. The show also benefited from having involvement of several actual comic book writers. As a result, many comic book characters and villains appeared on the show. *Superboy* was also caught up in the giant *Batman* tsunami and starting with season 3 the stories and tone became darker and more noir-ish.

The end of the show would coincide with a complicated legal wrangling of the rights to Superman in the movies and TV. Warner Bros reclaimed the rights to the Superman movies after the failure of *Superman IV* because the Salkinds had sold the franchise rights to the Cannon group after the failures of



The First Boy of Steel and Lana Lang

Superman III and *Supergirl*. The Salkind's then changed gears and developed *Superboy* for TV, but Warner Bros had plans for a Superman series as well, one that would not be in the same continuity as the *Superboy* show. As the show was ending, Warner Bros filed a lien against the Salkinds so they could reclaim certain rights. This lien prevented the Salkinds from producing any more shows with either Superboy or Superman after the end of the show. They scrapped the TV movie plans, rewrote the cliffhanger finale, and challenged the lien in court, which ended in a settlement. This gave Warner Bros full control of Superman and they would use that to bring the Man of Steel back to the small screen for the first time since the 50s.

Superboy was almost, but not quite, the only new super hero show in the 80s, because there was a brief run of one other show. Mike Grell's *Sable* in 1987 had a torturous road to the small screen. Originally optioned by Gene Simmons of Kiss

for both TV and movie, the show became well known for only 2 things: the debut of Rene Russo, who was a complete and excellent actress from day one, and for only ever airing 6 episodes. Its failure was a lesson in studio meddling and inability to grasp the concept of the comic.

The pilot originally cast Gene in the lead role, but the network wasn't pleased with his look or performance, and he was replaced with Lewis Van Bergen, who was all right but the biggest problem lay in significantly changing the primary role of the main character. Jon Sable was a full-time mercenary and part-time children's book author, the antithesis of the Bruce Wayne/Clark Kent secret identity model that was prevalent. The network reverted this, and made Sable just like every other comic book

hero. The pilot tested extremely well in the 18-35 demographic, coming in at #1 with that group, so of course ABC aired it on Saturday night at 8pm, a time when almost none of those folks would be around. It was actually cancelled after the second episode with the rest airing at random times. Efforts continue to this day to bring Sable to the big or small screen.

The show should have been a shoe-in since it was real-world and didn't rely on needing fantastical effects, just guns, stunts and action. Even with all that the show is not too bad actually, but it does suffer from the "made by people who don't get comics" syndrome.

This situation would finally begin to change after the massive success of the *Batman* movie in 1989. Along with the increased interest in super heroes this brought, technology was finally catching up to the aspirations and demands of pulling off better effects.

Though seen fondly as a cult show now, *Swamp Thing* (1990) was a series that was roundly criticized at the time it aired. Running for 3 seasons and starring Dick Durock of the *Swamp Thing* movies, it eschewed the gothic drama of the comic in favor of simple action and a fair amount of camp packed into a short half-hour format. *Swamp Thing* was allowed to speak quite a bit more in the series, with Durock having to memorize 10 pages a day(!) of script due to the compressed 2-episodes-per-week shooting schedule. Such a rushed production required cutting corners somewhere, and that usually resulted in single takes and low-end special effects, choreography and stunt work. Even though it was the number one rated show on USA for a while when it first aired, it is mostly remembered as a cheesy and goofy attempt at a comic TV adaptation.

1990 also saw another comic book super hero show air, this one done much better and with a significantly larger budget. *The Flash* aired on CBS in prime time and featured a straight classic take on the character with cutting edge effects and excellent production values. Development began in 1988 when Warner Bros. Television started up some TV films based on DC characters for CBS. Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo worked up several but none went beyond the initial planning stages. When CBS got a new president in 1990, *The Flash* was tapped to be put into production, which took place from January through May of 1990, with a fall release. The pilot was massive, with over 125 visual effects shots and a cost of \$6 million. Subsequent episodes

would cost upwards of \$1.6 million each making it one of the most expensive TV shows.

The show was very faithful to the comics, even if a few characters were moved around or invented. The stories were solid, with great guest actors and inventive situations to deal with a speedster. Coming in the wake of the *Batman* movie, there was a lot of attention paid to the source material and finding the right tone and approach. The opening theme music was even provided by that movie's musical composer, Danny Elfman. The theme music is lively and familiar, with all the usual up-tempo elements and beats of an Elfman score. The overall tone of the show was dramatic with touches of humor, sometimes dropping into goofiness, and sometimes dipping into grittier territory which was a reflection of the changing times and pointed the way to the handling of future comic heroes. Episodes were much more cinematic in nature, marking the first time this aesthetic would be used on a TV comic show, and would become the basic standard from here on out.



Don't Wait Around, Catch The Flash Before He's Gone!

To find their Barry Allen, the producers would tap John Wesley Shipp, who had spent the previous decade on various soap operas. No stranger to dramatic acting and episodic TV, he brought a professional quality to the role and had the acting chops to make the character work. Shipp was 35 at the time, but looked younger thanks to good genes and a workout regimen that kept him lean and buff. He was in such good shape that he would appear shirtless in many episodes to try to appeal to female viewers. Shipp's Barry is a good cop, an honest man with a somewhat sly sense of humor and a positive outlook.

Helping Barry understand and control his powers is Tina

McGee, a S.T.A.R. Labs scientist and sometime love interest. Played by Amanda Pays, an English actress in one of her first major American roles, McGee keeps Barry on track, sometimes literally, and aids him with technological solutions and advice. Barry is also aided by his co-worker and close friend Julio Mendez, a fellow police scientist, played by Alex Desert. Mendez spends the first several episodes suspicious of Barry's constant disappearances, but is eventually let in on his secret whereupon he joins the team in helping the Flash.

Also for the first time since the 60s, we finally had bona fide super villains on prime-time TV! *The Flash* featured his actual rogue's gallery, including Mirror Master played by David Cassidy, Captain Cold played by Michael Champion, and The Trickster played to the hilt by Mark Hamill. Hamill's

performance was so good they brought the character back a few times in the season. Hammil plays the character with maniacal glee, which essentially functioned as a dry-run for his eventual iconic voicing of the Joker on the *Batman: The Animated* series a couple of years later. His Trickster is zany and over the top, even by the standards of a comic book TV show about a guy in a red rubber suit that runs fast, but it is a fun and wild performance, and helped to play against the more straight-laced Barry Allen/Flash character.

Effects were state of the art, better than anything that had been seen on TV up to that point. Speed and running effects have always been difficult to pull off in either TV or movies, but *The Flash* ably handles updating this effect. By combining a significantly sped-up running Flash with some blurring and trailing after-images, the effect is far more convincing and less odd looking than just having someone sped up. Since the vast majority of the effects on the show were of this sped-up variety, once the technique was worked out it could be adapted and applied everywhere. The alternate effect, that of slowing everyone else down and keeping the Flash at near-normal speed to emphasize a specific moment in time, was also effective but much easier to achieve.

The suit for the Flash was a high-tech concoction of thick latex with a rubber surface specially treated to appear like a stretch unitard and less like spandex, and contained a water-cooling undergarment to counter heat build up. The suit was fantastic, fully sculpted to match John Wesley Shipp's chiseled physique with enough flexibility to allow a good range of movement.

The show lasted only one season, but this was not so much due to the quality of the show as to its cost and the absolute bungling of the scheduling of it from CBS. The show would air all over the schedule, then get pre-empted by things like the Gulf War in January all the way to being bumped in May for some of the NBA playoffs and finals. Some episodes that got bumped never re-aired, and there were few repeats in general, meaning no one got to see the full season until years later when it aired on the SciFi Channel.

The impact of the show on future efforts was immense. By putting real resources into the production and paying careful attention to the development, combined with a more serious and cinematic approach, *The Flash* is looked back on as a major step forward in the evolution of comic book heroes on TV.

Before *The Flash*, producers Danny Bilson and Paul DeMeo actually developed a show based on the *Human Target* comic

character by Len Wein and Carmine Infantino. The pilot was produced in 1990, but ABC passed on the show and this pilot never aired. It was picked up in 1991-1992 as a mid-season replacement consisting of seven episodes. The show as an action-adventure-slash-spy series starring Rick Springfield as Christopher Chance, a Vietnam War vet turned bodyguard and fix-it person. Utilizing high technology, stealth skills and playing a variety of roles via makeup, Chance would help various clients out of jams or to protect them, charging the unique sum of ten percent of the client's annual income! Sounds great on paper, but the actual show was not done well enough to capture an audience and was not renewed. A companion comic special was made to promote the show in late 1991. The idea would be revived in 2010 with slightly better results, running two seasons and generally regarded as a decent if unremarkable show.

The last hurrah for 90s comic book super hero television was *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1993) and this show would mark a significant turn in the production of comic

book TV shows. The show got a major push by Warner Bros. and ABC. Finally a respectable budget was allocated and a solid writer and producer was found in Deborah Joy LeVine.



Lois and Clark

The focus was squarely on the various interpersonal relationships within the show, particularly the budding romance between Lois and Clark, and the power play between Lex Luthor and Superman.

This was a trend that started in *The Flash* and was solidified in *Lois & Clark*, letting the characters and their daily lives carry the show while layering the super heroics on top. By focusing on the personalities and the underlying questions of what it means to be human, the show would resonate more with people and as a result develop a rabid fanbase. The idea of flawed heroes and imperfect people would become the standard for all comic shows to follow.

It also brought to the fore the romance between Lois and Clark, and this was another bold step. Previous comic book shows had minimal or no real significant romantic elements, relying instead on simple attraction and unrequited longing, always unfulfilled. *Lois & Clark* brought that to the center and pulled in a much broader audience as a result. An excellent cast and solid writing propelled the first season to one of the most watched comic shows of all time.

To pull off such a romantic-focused, character driven show a great cast was needed. Casting the first Superman on prime time TV in over 40 years was no small task, but with a bit of luck and some good casting choices, *Lois & Clark* had one of the strongest casts

of any comic book show. The cast was routinely cited as one of the best parts of the show.

Casting Superman would be a tough fish to land, especially following Christopher Reeve. The net was cast wide, and eventually ensnared Dean Cain in the title role. Cain was a solid choice, and having vaguely non-traditional foreign/alien features didn't hurt. His performance of Clark/Superman is quite different from those who came before. Cain's Clark is not the clumsy oaf of previous incarnations, and he comes across as a decent, regular guy. This extends to his Superman, who is a much simpler being, eschewing much of the built-up mythology from the previous 50 years. He seems more real and accessible than the archetypical near-flawless Superman of yore.

Exotically beautiful and with the right kind of acting experience, Teri Hatcher was cast to play the other title role and brings both strength and vulnerability to the role of Lois Lane. By turns she can be tough and challenging and lives to take Clark down a peg. The internet was just around the corner, and Hatcher became one of the first major stars for the new medium. At one point in 1995, a picture of her wrapped in Superman's cape was the most downloaded image on the internet.

Perry White was portrayed by the late, great Lane Smith, himself no stranger to episodic dramas. Lane's White is able to bellow with the best Perry White's of times past while also bringing a wit and charm with his full-throated laugh and reverence of all things Elvis.

Tracy Scoggins landed the role of Cat Grant, playing a vampy counter to Lois's more straight-laced professionalism. She also had eyes for Clark, who she considered a hunky target for her predatory attempts.

Michael Landes played Jimmy Olsen in an updating of the character to a more modern Gen X take on the role. Landes's Olsen was more capable and less bumbling, sometimes at the expense of rubbing people the wrong way. He would be replaced after the first season due to resembling lead actor Dean Cain too much. His replacement, Justin Whalin, would return the character more to his neophyte roots, and would engage the office staff on matters of his personal life. He was also a techno-geek, a computer whiz who lent his skills to several stories.

Helping keep Clark grounded are his parents, Jonathan Kent played by Eddie Jones, and Martha Kent played by K Callan. Both are wonderful and help to bring home the idea of Clark as the main identity and Superman as the secret identity. Scenes with them and Clark in Smallville sharing thoughts and aspirations, evaluating and analyzing Clark's role in the world and who he was becoming, would become a staple of future Superman efforts in both mediums.

John Shea turned in a masterful performance as Lex Luthor, easily one of the best interpretations of the character. Manipulative, cunning, egomaniacal, and obsessively jealous of Superman's power and popularity, Shea weaves Luthor's motivations and actions in a complex tapestry of self-determination and illicit exercises, always testing himself against the Man of Steel and often tasting the bitterness of defeat. Alas, he would only appear for the first season, then a few times after that.

Based loosely on the John Byrne incarnation of Superman, *Lois & Clark* carries many elements over including Cat Grant and the portrayal of Lex Luthor as corrupt captain of industry, as opposed to his traditional comic role of mad scientist. This was a completely contemporary production that would keep up with the times as it aired. The pilot episode features a space shuttle rescue which would then go on to appear in one form or another in nearly every other incarnation of Superman on the big or small screen.

The first season was a bit more grounded in its adversaries and conflicts. Lois and Clark's involvement in combating crime were more a function of their discovery or uncovering of such plots. Many of the episodes revolve around Lex Luthor as well and are of the "Lex provides advanced tech to a criminal" variety. The show had high production values and fidelity to the history of the character, and enjoyed high ratings for its first few seasons. After season one, Deborah Joy LeVine left the show and was replaced by Robert Singer, who shifted the focus to more action and accelerated the romance between Lois and Clark. Plots and villains would become more comic-like and fantastical, with Superman appearing as much as Clark.

Season three featured a major debacle. It was widely announced that Lois and Clark were going to get married in an episode that would air on Valentine's Day. ABC even went so far as to send out invitations to their news staff and played it up like the real deal. It ended up being a giant swerve, as Lois was revealed to be a clone which kicked off a five part story where the real Lois had been kidnapped by Lex Luthor and suffered from amnesia. The backlash was quick and intense. It would lead a fourth episode being titled "*Swear to God, This Time We're Not Kidding*" which featured, finally, the actual wedding of Lois and Clark on TV. At least the producers of the show had a sense of humor by this point.

By the end of the 4th and final season, storylines were aborted or dropped, with a few lingering, unanswered questions, especially with the Intergang subplot, which never really got the chance to develop. This was just before attention would be paid to serializing the stories more and creating overarching storylines that could run throughout an entire season. The fourth season ended on a cliffhanger, and ABC had announced a fifth season, but they ultimately changed their minds and cancelled the show.

Overall *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* was a fun and optimistic show, filled with humor, character exploration, and light drama all wrapped up in a red cape. The show could definitely veer into camp, though not to the extent of something like the Batman show, but it kept the tone light and frothy. The dramatic elements were never too serious and the action was stylized and colorful. It was a modern updating of this classic character, and played well in the 90s era of sitcom heaven and teen drama shows with the sensibilities of their time. It whetted the appetite for more and Superman would return just a few short years later in a very different kind of show.

Join us next issue when we tackle the one type of show ideally suited for comic books: animated super hero TV shows!

Jef Parker and the Beginning of Collector's Edge Comics (continued)

Background Of The Time

First a little background into the Milwaukee of this time. Milwaukee then was a working class city, full of beer factories, bars everywhere, machine shops, construction and steelworks, shipyards - it's a manufacturing town and is a big hub of commerce being on the shores of Lake Michigan. The now-classic "Hello Milwaukee" song, adapted endlessly by other cities in the USA and even Canada, originated here in the late 70s. It was the era of bell-bottoms, corduroy pants - horrible fashion in general - muscle cars and gas shortages, the idea of the blockbuster movie was just taking form, music on the radio was evolving in interesting ways while music on TV shows was the same terrible derivative of three or four jangly guitars and horns mish-mashed up, toys were trying to keep up with the rapid pace of new technology, and anywhere else always seemed more interesting than wherever you were. It was into this time and place that my comics collecting journey began.

I was like a lot of kids then. I was into old TV shows, SciFi, riding bikes, and collecting things like sports cards. My travel was limited. I had a bike, but never ventured very far from my neighborhood on my own, sticking mostly to the area defined by home, my relatives, and school. We were aware of all these interesting places around the huge Milwaukee area, but we never really ventured very far. They remained these distant places full of wonderful experiences you would hear others talk about, and you just had to use your imagination and dream. Ah, the life of an adolescent in the big city.

This was all prior to the major revolution of electronics, communications, and subsequently the internet. Video games were nascent and the classic Atari video game console was about to be released. Home computers were still years away from being anything you would own, and not a single one was to be found at any schools outside of the universities. Home video wasn't even a thing yet, with the first Betamax machines just coming out and tape rental still a ways off. Socializing consisted of hanging out, going to movies, more hanging out, lots of playing outside, talking on an analog rotary-dial phone, and the occasional shopping trip to the mall (Southgate, mostly, and all over 27th street) though this was a bit before the era of hanging out in the food courts as most malls didn't have them yet. Field trips from school were awesome, ranging from the educational (the Planetarium or a museum, or the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago if you were lucky) to the decidedly flat-out non-academic (Movies like *The Muppet Movie* and *Six Flags Great America*. Yes really) and either way it was a day off from school. To fund our lavish lifestyles in recession-era Milwaukee, we mowed lawns with hand mowers, sold crystal ornaments and other trinkets door-to-door, and made big money in the winter time shoveling

sidewalks, especially for the bars of which there were five just on my immediate block and across the street.

My Introduction To Comics

Somewhere along the way, I had been given a handful of comics. I don't remember all of them, but for certain there was a *JLA* 80 page giant that reprinted *Brave and the Bold* #28, an issue of *Iron Fist* or possibly *Marvel Premiere*, and *Marvel Team Up* #56 with Daredevil versus the Blizzard and Electro. What a great package! Colorful art and stories that you can read like a novel, but with pictures! It was like a movie and novel combined. I became highly interested in language and reading as a result, and eventually this would spill over into novels. Soon I was reading at 3 grade levels higher than my own.

I read and re-read these many times over, and when mom would go to one of the used bookstores nearby looking for novels, I would look through its section of comics. These were loosely organized in boxes, upright instead of in piles, with prices penciled inside on the first page. I started to learn about the many different kinds of comics, but at 9 or 10 years old, I could hardly afford any. Prices on some of the silver age books like *JLA* were 25 cents to several dollars! If I had a dollar or two to buy some, I would try to get the best ones for the least money.

I remember getting a couple of *Superboy* issues that looked interesting and fit my budget. In one issue, Superboy de-powers himself via controlled intentional kryptonite poisoning so he can engage in a boxing match without an unfair advantage. In another a dying boy who idolized him believes he has been granted Superboy's powers via a serum to become the hero Supremo! He sets out on a series of super feats, but Superboy was secretly shadowing him and performing the feats for him and ultimately allowing him to defeat a prehistoric beast that even Superboy could not best. One that stood out was *Superboy* #158, technically not an imaginary story and actual canon for a while, where he finds his actual mother and father in suspended animation in a rocket drifting in space! His attempts to revive them fail, as they would be subject to Kryptonite poisoning due to the long exposure from years in space and would die shortly after being revived. Superboy has no choice but to put them back into space, there to drift for all eternity. Quite the bittersweet story, full of drama and pathos. Stories like these had an indelible impact on me. I had not seen anything quite like them and determined to find more.

Unfortunately I can't recall the location of this bookstore, but I very much remember the shop I eventually found to add more comics to my collection, one that had mostly comic books, a store near and dear to the hearts of many a comic collector of that era: Chet's Variety Store.

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